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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001446

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SE (SILVERMAN AND GOELLNER-SWEET), DRL/IL
(WHITE), LABOR FOR BRUMFIELD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2013
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH LABOR: MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S.
Kass. Reason: 1.5(b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkish labor-related organizations are focusing on IPEC and employment termination programs. In a climate where the GOT is seen at the very least as not encouraging labor union activity, these organizations are working to preserve benefits already available rather than initiating or expanding programs. This lack of dynamism is a key feature of labor activity in Turkey. End summary.

Programs

¶2. (C) Various labor union confederations, an employer confederation, a Turkish Ministry of Labor official and a NGO official recently highlighted to us their participation in IPEC (International Program to Eliminate Child Labor) and each implied that it had played a major role in this three-year old campaign. In addition, under the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) administration, the various labor entities are participating in a committee to review regulations regarding employment termination, an initiative linked to concerns about privatization of Turkish industry.

Labor and Politics

¶3. (C) While Turkish labor unions are barred from participating in politics, often the more active, influential union leaders serve on a variety of government-sponsored committees and have informal connections with politicians. Uniformly, labor union representatives assert to us that they had not promoted particular political candidates during the November 3 national election (which AKP won heavily). At the same time, they allow that an informal poll of members probably would show that each union's vote would break down along the same political lines as the overall electorate.
(Comment: If the labor vote followed the national trend, it would suggest there is widespread support inside Turkey for AKP. End comment.)

-- HAK IS uses social democratic language to describe its programs but is in fact the most conservative/Islamic of the three major Turkish labor confederations. Claiming 310,000 members, Hak Is considers reforming the informal economy one of its pressing issues. Hak Is wants to assure adequate compensation for workers and advocates social as well as economic objectives. According to Hak Is representatives, while trade unions are theoretically free to advocate a variety of ideas, the State authorities often resort to generating "obstacles" -- including low level harassment such as inducing sound or video system malfunctions at rallies -- to undercut ideological messages at odds with Kemalist propriety.

-- Turk Is, the left of center labor confederation, advocates expanding worker rights and believes the potential impact of any privatization program will be injurious to Turkish workers. Yildirim Koc is the current advisor to Turk Is's president; he was jailed for working closely with the Soviet Union during the Communist era. Koc asserted to us recently that the rank and file of Turk Is is strongly antipathetic to American initiatives. Turk Is believes workers will be hurt as a result of IMF restructuring programs. Koc confirms that while his organization has 2.5 million members on paper, actual membership is closer to 750,000 -- still a sizable number compared to Hak Is. Noting that unions are permitted in Turkey, Koc lamented that GOT tactics do not encourage labor union organizing.

-- Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TISK) is a voluntary, dues-paying organization supported by 17 employer associations, representatives of virtually every major industry in Turkey. TISK participates in the International Labor Organization, International Organization of Employers, Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD. Its primary objective is to promote the interests of public and private employers.

COMMENT

14. (C) Like much of Turkey, the labor organizations are in a "wait and see" mode. Rather than embarking on new programs, labor organizations as a rule seldom demonstrate a knack for innovative approaches to developing problems. This, together with the habitual tendency toward deference of labor and other "NGOs" to the State authorities, indicates that the labor "movement" in Turkey lacks the dynamism to advance "workers'" interests.

PEARSON